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Homer and Greek Myth

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(The page-numbers of the printed version are embedded within brackets in this electronic version: for example, {52|53} marks where p. 52 stops and p. 53 begins.)

(The Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are each divided into twenty-four *rhapsōidiai* ‘rhapsodies’, sometimes called ‘scrolls’ or ‘books’, which are divisions based on traditions of performance [PR 63]. Numberings of the Rhapsodies of the *Iliad* / *Odyssey* will be indicated by upper-case / lower-case roman numerals.)

In the classical period of Greek literature, Homer was the primary representative of what we know as epic. The figure of Homer as a poet of epic was considered to be far older than the oldest known poets of lyric, who stemmed from the archaic period. It was thought that Homer, acknowledged as the poet of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, stemmed from an earlier age. Herodotus (second half of the fifth century BCE) says outright that Homer and Hesiod were the first poets of the Greeks (2.53.1–3). It does not follow, however, that the myths conveyed by the poetry of Homer and Hesiod are consistently older than the myths conveyed by the poetry of lyric. In fact, the traditions of Greek lyric are in many ways older than the traditions of Greek epic, and the myths conveyed by epic are in many ways newer than the myths conveyed by lyric.

As I argue in the companion piece “Lyric and Greek Myth,” the traditions of Greek lyric were rooted in oral poetry. If, then, Homer as a poet of epic was thought to have lived in an even earlier era than the era of the earliest known poets of lyric, it follows that the traditions of epic as represented by Homer were likewise rooted in oral poetry.

The oral traditional basis of Homeric poetry can be demonstrated by way of comparative as well as internal analysis. The decisive impetus for comparative research comes from the evidence of living oral traditions. The two most prominent names in the history of this research are Milman Parry (collected papers published posthumously in Parry 1971) and Albert Lord (definitive books published in 1960, 1991, 1995). Although Parry had started his own research by analyzing the internal evidence of Homeric poetry, as reflected in the texts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, he later set out to observe first-hand the living oral poetic traditions of the former Yugoslavia (first in the summer of 1933, and then from June 1934 to September 1935). {52|53}

On the basis of his comparative analysis, Parry found that oral poetry was not restricted to epic, which had seemed, at first, to be the prototypical poetic genre in the prehistory of Greek literature. Parry's finding has been reinforced by the cumulative evidence of ongoing comparative research, which shows that oral poetry and prose span a wide range of genres in large-scale as well as small-scale societies throughout the world; further, epic is not a universal type of poetry, let alone a privileged prototype (PH 14§§2–3).

On the basis of internal evidence as well, Parry found that epic was not the only extant form of ancient Greek poetry that derived directly from oral traditions. Parry's own work (1932) on the poetry of Sappho and of Alcaeus showed that oral traditions shaped the ancient Greek traditions of lyric as well as epic. The work of Lord (1995:22–68) has provided comparative evidence to reinforce Parry's internal evidence about Greek lyric. As we see from the combined work of Parry and Lord, to draw a line between Homer and the rest of ancient Greek literature is to risk creating a false dichotomy. There is a similar risk in making rigid distinctions between oral and written aspects of early Greek poetry in general (Lord 1995:105–106).

In the history of research on ancient Greek literature, the single most important body of internal evidence showing traces of oral traditions has been the text of Homeric poetry, in the form of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. For some (like Adam Parry 1966:193), the artistry of an epic like the *Iliad* is living proof that the text is “the design of a single mind.” By implication, the artistic organization and cohesiveness of Homeric poetry must be indicative of individual creativity, achievable only in writing. We see here the makings of another false dichotomy: what is “unique” and therefore supposedly literary is contrasted with what is “multiform” and therefore supposedly oral. The fact is that multiformity, as a characteristic of oral poetry, is a matter of degrees and historical contingencies: for example, even if “our” *Iliad* is less multiform than, say, a poem of the so-called Epic Cycle like the *Cypria*, it does not follow that Homeric poetry is absolutely uniform while “Cyclic” poetry is multiform (HTL 25–39).

In the oral poetics of lyric, we saw that composition interacts with performance, and such interaction is parallel to the interaction of myth with ritual. The same can be said about the epic poetry attributed to Homer: to perform this epic is to activate myth, and such activation is fundamentally a matter of ritual. {53 | 54}

Homeric poetry actually demonstrates how myth is activated. It does this by quoting, as it were, the performance of poetry within its own poetry. The performers of such poetry are characters of epic, human and divine alike, represented as speaking within the epic, and what they speak – that is, what they perform – is poetry embedded within the poetry of epic. What they speak is “speech-acts” (Martin 1989). This term speech-act designates a special way of speaking in situations where you are actually doing something by way of speaking something (Austin 1962). In Homeric poetry, the making of poetry is itself an act of doing by way of

speaking, and that act of doing is an act of performance (HQ 119). In Homeric poetry, the word for such a performative act is *muthos*, ancestor of the modern term myth.

This word *muthos* refers to the following kinds of speech acts as quoted by Homeric poetry: boasts, threats, invectives, laments, prophecies, and prayers (Martin 1989:12–42). Such speech-acts, in and of themselves, need not be poetry: but they become poetry once they are framed by poetry. And, in the act of framing, the poetry of epic demonstrates that it, too, like the poetry it frames, is a speech-act. The making of Homeric poetry, that is, the composing of this poetry, is notionally the same thing as doing something, which is the performing of this poetry. Just as the making of boasts, threats, invectives, laments, prophecies, and prayers is literally a matter of doing these things, that is, of ritually performing speech-acts, so also the making of Homeric poetry is a matter of ritually performing the epic that frames these same speech-acts. Just as the speech-acts framed by Homeric poetry are *muthoi*, so also Homeric poetry is itself an overall *muthos*.

Here is a working definition of *muthos* as it functions within the epic frame of Homeric poetry: it is “a speech-act indicating authority, performed at length, usually in public, with a focus on full attention to every detail” (Martin 1989:12). This working definition applies also to the epic frame itself, that is, to Homeric poetry as defined by the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (HQ 120–121, 128–138).

In Homeric poetry, to speak a *muthos* is to perform it from memory. A *muthos* is a speech-act of recollection (Martin 1989:44). In the *Iliad*, for example, when the old hero Nestor is trying to make a point by way of recalling the story of the battle of the Centaurs and the Lapiths (I 260–274), he says that the point he is making is a *muthos* (I 273). In making his point, directed at Agamemnon and Achilles, Nestor is recalling his own participation in the older story, which he says happened in an era predating the era of the present story, that is, in an era that predates the era of the *Iliad*. {54|55} So the *muthos* of Nestor here is embedded within the overall *muthos* of Homeric poetry - in this case, of the *Iliad*.

In Homeric poetry, the recalling of a memory is not necessarily an act of recalling a personal experience, as in the case of Nestor. In other epic situations, the speaker may recall something that happened in an era predating his own lifetime. Such is the case when the old hero Phoenix tells a story directed at the young hero Achilles. He introduces his story by saying:

memnēmai tode ergon egō palai ou ti neon ge

hōs ēn. en d' hūmīn erepantessi philoisi

I totally recall [me-mnē-mai] this action that happened a long time ago - it is not something new -

exactly how it was. I will tell it in your company - since you are all near and dear to me.

When the verb *mnē-* in the sense of ‘recall’ takes a direct object in the accusative case, as here, then the act of recalling is total and absolute; when, on the other hand, this verb takes an object in the genitive case, then the act of recalling is only partial and therefore not at all absolute, as in the case of reminiscing (HQ 152n13). Phoenix says that he had learned his story from others (IX 524). So the question is, how can you recall an epic action that you did not personally experience?

The answer is to be found in the word *kleos* ‘glory’, the abbreviated plural form of which is *klea* ‘glories’, which refers to the story told by Phoenix. This story, which is about the hero Meleager, is intended by its narrator as a model for the story about the hero Achilles, which is a story-in-progress while it is being performed. The *klea* ‘glories’ of heroic predecessors are being set up as a model for the main hero of the *Iliad*:

This is the way [*houtōs*] that we [= I, Phoenix] learned it, the glories [*klea*] of men of
an earlier time
who were heroes - whenever one of them was overcome by tempestuous anger ...

Iliad IX 524–525

The expression *klea andron*, which I have translated here as ‘glories of men (of an earlier time)’, applies not only to the epic story about Meleager {55|56}. As we will see, it applies also to the epic story about Achilles. That is how the heroic song of Homeric poetry refers to itself.

The word *kleos* applies to Homeric poetry as performed by the master Narrator of that poetry. Etymologically, *kleos* is a noun derived from the verb *kluein* ‘hear’ and means ‘that which is heard’. In the *Iliad*, the master Narrator declares that the epic he narrates is something he ‘hears’ from the Muses (II 486 *akouein*), who know everything because they were present when everything happened (II 485). What the omniscient Muses see and what they hear is a total recall: they recall everything that has ever happened, whereas the Narrator only hears the *kleos* from the Muses (BA 1§§2–4). The Narrator of epic depends on these goddesses to tell him exactly what they saw and to quote for him exactly what they heard.

So the omniscient Muses are goddesses of total recall, and their absolute power of recall is expressed by an active form of the verb *mnē-* in the sense of ‘remind’ (II 492). The master Narrator of the *Iliad* receives the same absolute power of total recall when he prays to the goddesses to tell him everything about the Achaean forces that sailed to Troy (II 484, 491–492). Inspired by the omniscient Muses, he becomes an omniscient Narrator. Although he says he will not exercise the option of telling everything in full, deciding instead to tell only the salient details by concentrating on the names of the leaders of the warriors who sailed to Troy and on the precise number of each leader’s ships (II 493), the master Narrator insists on his

power of total recall (HTL 175n78; cf. 80n75). The very idea of such mental power is basic to Homeric poetry.

When Phoenix says he has total recall, totally recalling the epic action he narrates, his power of memory depends on the power of the omniscient Narrator who tells the framing story of the *Iliad*, and that power in turn depends on the power of the omniscient Muses themselves, who are given credit for controlling the master Narrative.

Phoenix has total recall because he uses the medium of poetry and because his mind is connected to the power source of poetry. He expresses himself in the meter of epic, dactylic hexameter, because he is speaking inside a medium that expresses itself that way. He is “speaking” in dactylic hexameter just like the master Narrator who is quoting him. When Phoenix says *memnōmai*, he is in effect saying: ‘I have total recall by way of speaking in the medium of poetry.’

As we have seen, Phoenix refers to his story as *klea andrōn | hōrōn* ‘the glories [kleos plural] of men of an earlier time who were heroes’ (IX 524–525). It is a story about the hero Meleager and his anger against his people, parallel to the framing story about the hero Achilles and his {56|57} anger against his own people, the Achaeans (also known as the Argives or the Danaans). The telling of the story by Phoenix is an activation of epic within epic.

Phoenix is a hero in the epic of the Homeric *Iliad*, and this epic is a narrative about the distant heroic past – from the standpoint of listeners who live in a present tense devoid of contemporary heroes. But Phoenix here is narrating to listeners who live in that distant heroic past tense. And his narrative-within-a-narrative is about heroes who lived in an even more distant heroic past tense.

Just as the framing epic about the anger of Achilles is technically a speech-act, a *muthos*, so too is the framed epic about the anger of Meleager. Conversely, just as the framed epic about Meleager is a poetic recollection of the *klea* ‘glories’ of heroes of the past, so too is the framing epic about Achilles. That framing epic, which is the *Iliad*, is a poetic recollection by the Muse whom the master Narrator invokes to sing the story of the anger of Achilles (I 1). As the narrator of a framed epic, Phoenix does not have to invoke the goddesses of memory, the Muses, since the Narrator of the framing epic has already invoked them for him.

Technically, everything in Homeric poetry is said by the Muses. One of these Muses is specially invoked, but without a special name, at the beginning of the *Iliad* and, again, at the beginning of the *Odyssey*. And everything is heard by the master Narrator, who then says it all to those who hear him just as characters say what they say to the characters who hear them within the master Narrative. Those who hear the master Narrator include the characters inside the action of his master Narrative: they too are assumed to be listening to the master

Narration, and that is why Homeric characters like Menelaos, Patroklos, and Eumaios can be addressed in the second person by the master Narrator (Martin 1989:235–236).

All poetry embedded within the outer frame of Homeric narrative is epic poetry - to the extent that the outer frame is epic poetry. But the embedded poetry can also take on a vast variety of forms other than epic. An example is lament. The quotations of laments performed by women in the *Iliad* show a poetic form that belongs to the general category of lyric, not epic, as I argue in the companion piece “Lyric and Greek Myth.” Still, when epic as *muthos* refers to lament, it can call this lyric form a *muthos*, as in the case of a lament performed for the hero Hector by his grieving mother Hecuba in the *Iliad* (XXIV 200). Such a lament is a *muthos* not because it is in fact a lament but simply because it is framed and regulated by the master *muthos* that is epic (Martin 1989:87–88).

The regulatory power of epic as a master *muthos* leads poets who are outside of epic to question the veracity of *muthoi* in epic. For a {57 | 58} lyric poet like Pindar, the problem with Homeric *muthoi* is the fact that they are framed by epic and therefore controlled and regulated by epic. Such control and regulation lead to *pseudea* ‘falsehoods’ that go far beyond the truth, as in the case of Homeric stories about Odysseus:

I think that the things said about Odysseus outnumber the things he experienced - all because of Homer, the one with the sweet words, whose falsehoods [*pseudea*] and winged inventiveness have a kind of majesty hovering over them; poetic craft [*sophia*], misleading by way of its myths [*muthoi*], is deceptive. Blind in heart are most men. For if they could have seen the truth [*al□theia*], never would great Ajax, angered over the armor [of Achilles], have driven the burnished sword through his own heart.

Pindar *Nemean* 7.20–27

The lyric setting of this song of Pindar is defined by local rituals as well as local myths connected to the hero Ajax: the song was meant to be performed in the island-state of Aegina, culturally dominated by elites who claimed to be descended from a heroic lineage that included Ajax (PH 6§§56–58, 8§10n41). In Pindar’s words, the local fame of Ajax in Aegina is defended by the singular *al□theia* ‘truth’ of lyric - while it is assaulted by the multiple *muthoi* ‘myths’ of epic (PH 14§22). Whereas the perspective of lyric is localized and thus grounded, enabling the listener to visualize - literally, to see - the integrated singularity of *al□theia* ‘truth’, the perspective of epic is delocalized and thus ungrounded, allowing the listener only to hear a disintegrated multiplicity of *muthoi* ‘myths’.

Whereas the singular ‘truth’ of Pindar’s lyric highlights the integrity of Ajax, the multiple ‘myths’ of Homer’s epic shade it over. In this way, epic allows Odysseus to seize the advantage at the expense of Ajax. The epic focus of interest shifts from the integrity of Ajax to the craftiness of Odysseus, and this shift blurs the moral focus of Homer. From the

retrospective vantage point of the moral high ground claimed by the lyric poetry of Pindar, this shift in interest causes the despair that led to the suicide of Ajax. This despair is tied to the epic story that tells how Ajax, consistently marked as the second-best of the Achaeans after Achilles in the *Iliad*, failed to win as his prize the armor of Achilles after the martial death of that hero, who is consistently marked as the best of the Achaeans (BA 2§§1–6). The despair of Ajax is tied also to his failure to become the next hero in line to be called the best of the Achaeans and thus {58|59} to continue the epic of Homer after the *Iliad*. This failure is pointedly mentioned in the Homeric *Odyssey* (xi 541–567; PH 8§33n110).

The epic failure of Ajax is a foil for the epic success of Odysseus, which is made possible by the poetic craft of Homer's *Odyssey*. Just as the craftiness of Odysseus prevents Ajax from inheriting the armor of Achilles, so also the craft of Homer prevents Ajax from inheriting the epic status of being called 'the best of the Achaeans' after the death of Achilles. In the *Odyssey*, that epic status is earned by Odysseus through his own epic experiences after the death of Achilles (BA 2§§12–18).

As we have seen from Pindar's *Nemean* 7, the *muthoi* 'myths' about the experiences of Odysseus are to some extent falsehoods. They are falsehoods, however, not because they are myths but only because they are controlled by a master myth that differs from the master myth privileged as the truth by Pindar. That different master myth is controlled by the master Narrator of the *Odyssey*. Under such control, the myths about Odysseus in the *Odyssey* lose the grounding they once had in their local contexts. Once *muthoi* 'myths' are delocalized, they become relative and thus multiple in application, to be contrasted with the *al□theia* 'truth' claimed by lyric, which is supposedly absolute and unique (PH 7§5n17).

As we are now about to see from Pindar's *Olympian* 1, *muthoi* 'myths' can be imagined as additions to the kernel of truth as expressed by wording that is *al□th□s* 'true'. Such additional myths stand for an undifferentiated outer core, where various versions from various locales may contradict each other, while the wording that is *al□th□s* 'true' stands for a differentiated inner core of myth that tends to avoid the conflicts of localized versions (PH 2§28):

Yes, there are many wondrous things [*thaumata*]. And the words that men tell, myths [*muthoi*] embellished with varied pattern-woven [*poikila*] falsehoods [*pseudea*], beyond wording [*logos*] that is true [*al□th□s*], are deceptive. But charisma [*kharis*], which makes everything pleasurable for mortals, brings it about, by way of giving honor, that even the unbelievable oftentimes becomes believable.

Pindar *Olympian* 1.28–32

A multiplicity of 'false' myths is being contrasted here with a singular master myth described as *logos* 'wording' that is *al□th□s* 'true'. So even some *muthoi* 'myths' retold by Pindar

can be rejected as falsehoods in the process of retelling those myths. There is a comparable idea of {59|60} *pseudea* ‘false things’ as told by the Muses in addition to the *alēthea* ‘true things’ they tell in the poetics of Hesiod (*Theogony* 27–28; PH 2§32).

The myths that Pindar’s song marks as ‘false’ have to do with things heard and not seen (*Olympian* 1.46–48). As I argue in the companion piece, “Lyric and Greek Myth,” such myths are ‘false’ not because they are myths but only because they are myths that differ from the master myth privileged by Pindar, and that master myth is notionally the only myth that can be ‘true’ at the moment of telling it. While the myths that are ‘false’ can merely be heard, details from the alternative myth that is ‘true’ can actually be visualized, that is, literally seen (*Olympian* 1.26–27).

The conceit of lyric poetry is that it can see the truth that it tells, whereas epic poetry only hears what it tells, and what epic hears may or may not be true. A prime example is a song known as the palinode or recantation of the lyric poet Stesichorus (F 193): in this song, the poet rejects the myths that tell how Helen allowed herself to be abducted by Paris from her home in Sparta, substituting another myth that claims she never left Sparta. This alternative myth about Helen, which highlights her status as a goddess, is grounded in local Dorian traditions (Pausanias 3.19.11; PH 14§§13–21), and it is complemented by a myth about Stesichorus himself: according to this complementary myth, the poet had been blinded by the goddess for having defamed her, since he had perpetuated myths affirming her abduction by Paris – but then the goddess restored the eyesight of Stesichorus in order to reward the poet for unsinging, as it were, his previous song by way of singing his palinode or recantation (Isocrates *Helen* 64; Conon FGH 26 F 1.18; Plato *Phaedrus* 243a).

There is a parallel myth about Homer: this poet too had been blinded by Helen for having defamed her, since he too had perpetuated myths affirming her abduction by Paris (*Life of Homer* 6.51–57 ed. Allen); unlike the lyric poet Stesichorus, however, the epic poet Homer never recants – and he stays blind forever (Plato *Phaedrus* 243a). Unlike lyric poetry, which privileges the metaphor of seeing the true myth, the epic poetry of Homer privileges the metaphor of hearing from the Muses the *kleos* ‘glory’ of the myths that he tells (*Iliad* II 486); as we have seen, even the word *kleos*, derived from *kluein* ‘hear’, proclaims the privileging of this metaphor of hearing (PH 14§19).

As we see from such contrasts between lyric master myths that are seen and epic myths that are just heard, not all myths qualify as the truth in any single telling of myths. Whereas all myths count as *muthoi* in Homeric poetry, including the epic master myth told by the master Narrator himself, a master myth told in other media need not be {60|61} called a *muthos*. Not all *muthoi* count as myths in the positive sense of the word *muthos* as used in Homeric poetry.

Even in Homeric poetry, where *muthos* is used consistently in a positive sense, not all *muthoi* are myths of and by themselves. Such is the case in situations where the word *muthos* functions as a synonym of the expression *epea pteroenta* ‘winged words’: in each of these epic situations, the one who is speaking to the one who is listening succeeds in making a speech-act that makes that listener do something that is specially significant to the plot of epic (Martin 1989:30-37, HQ 122). Such a speech-act is a myth only to the extent that it gets to be told within the framework of a master Narrative that counts as a *muthos*, that is, as the Homeric master myth.

Even those Homeric speech-acts that are not marked by the word *muthos* or by a synonym have the power of complementing and enhancing the telling of the Homeric master myth. Such is the case with the telling of Homeric similes, which serve the purpose of advancing the epic action by intensifying its vitality (on the telling of a simile as an act of divination, see Muellner 1990). The point of entry for these similes tends to be situated either before or after the occurrence of climactic moments in the epic action (Martin 1997:146). The power of the Homeric simile in driving the narrative forward is a matter of performance.

For the Homeric tradition in general, it can be said that the intensity of maintaining the epic narrative was correlated with the intensity of physically performing that narrative. There is a striking example in the commentary tradition preserved by the scholia for the Townley codex of the *Iliad* (at XVI 131), where we read that the verses telling about the arming of Patroklos needed to be performed in an intensely rushed tempo: *speudonta dei propheresthai tauta, epipothō sin tēs exhodon mimoumenon* ‘one must produce this in a rush, re-enacting the desire for the outcome [of the epic action]’ (Martin 1997:141).

The strong visual component of Homeric similes stems mainly from lyric traditions that are still evident in later poetry, especially in the choral songs of Pindar and in the sympotic poetry of Theognis (Martin 1997:153–166). A most vivid example is a simile that visualizes the Achaeans at a moment of defeat in battle in the *Iliad* by comparing them to a blighted population suffering from the conflagration caused by a thunderstorm (XVII 735–739). The wording in this simile is evidently cognate with the wording that describes a cosmic flood caused by Zeus in a song of Pindar (*Olympian* 9.49–53; Martin 1997:160–161). In general, the *Iliad* is pervaded by similes centering on the complementary themes {61|62} of cosmic flood and cosmic conflagration, that is, of cataclysm and ecpyrosis respectively, and these themes are initiated by what is called the Will of Zeus at the beginning of the *Iliad* (I 5): ecpyrosis applies to both the Trojans and the Achaeans, while cataclysm applies only to the Achaeans (EH §§63–64; PR 66). In the *Iliad*, the fire of the Achaeans menacing the Trojans and, conversely, the fire of the Trojans menacing the Achaeans are both pervasively compared to a cosmic conflagration expressing the *mēnis* ‘anger’ of Zeus (BA 20§§13–20; Muellner 1996). Similarly, when it is foretold that the rivers of the Trojan plain will erase all traces of the Achaean Wall at Troy, the

flooding of the plain is described in language that evokes a cosmic cataclysm (*Iliad* XII 17–33; EH §64).

The power of the Homeric simile in advancing the plot of epic is evident in the *Odyssey* as well. A most striking example is the simile that describes the blinding of the Cyclops called Polyphemus: when Odysseus and his men thrust into the single eye of the monster the fire-hardened tip of a wooden stake they had just crafted, the sound produced by this horrific act is compared to the sound produced when a blacksmith is tempering steel as he thrusts into cold water the red-hot edge of the axe or adze he is crafting (ix 390–394). From a cross-cultural survey of myths that tell how a hero who stands for the civilizing forces of culture blinds a monster who stands for the brutalizing forces of nature, it becomes clear that such myths serve the purpose of providing an aetiology for the invention of technology (Burkert 1979:33–34). (On the concept of aetiology, see BA 16§2n2.) It is no coincidence that the three Cyclopes in the Hesiodic *Theogony* (139–146) are imagined as exponents of technology: they are identified as the three blacksmiths who crafted the thunderbolt of Zeus (Burkert 1979:156n23). The Cyclopes, then, are connected with technology in two opposite ways: either they are defeated by it, or they practice it. In the *Odyssey*, the simile about the tempering of steel in the Homeric narration of the blinding of Polyphemus serves the purpose of contextualizing and even advancing that narration by way of highlighting aspects of an underlying myth that is otherwise shaded over.

In considering the function of similes in the narrating of the master myth in Homeric narrative, we have seen that their formal features are distinct from those of epic, and that they follow their own distinct rules. To that extent, the simile may be classified as a genre distinct from the genre of epic as represented by Homeric poetry. Still, as we have also seen, the internal rules of the simile mesh with the external rules of the epic that frames it. So instead of saying that the framed form of the simile is a subgenre of epic, it is more apt to say that the framing form of the epic is a supergenre (Martin 1997:166). {62 | 63}

Besides the simile, there are also other genres framed within the supergenre of epic, and each of these genres affects in its own way the narration of the master myth. To take a premier example, let us return to the story told by the old hero Phoenix to the young hero Achilles in the *Iliad*. At first sight this story seems to be simply an epic in its own right. A second look, however, shows much more. This story follows rules of its own, some of which differ from the rules of epic.

As Achilles contemplates the decisions he faces in the making of an epic that centers on his own epic actions, he is invited by Phoenix to contemplate the decisions faced by an earlier hero in the making of an earlier epic. As we saw earlier, that hero is Meleager, who figures in an earlier epic called the *klea* ‘glories’ of heroes (IX 524–525). The framed epic about Meleager, quoted as a direct speech by the framing epic, is introduced by way of a special word *houtos*

‘thus’, signaling the activation of a special form of speech otherwise known as the *ainos* (PH 7§1n4). Technically, an *ainos* is a performance conveying a meaning that needs to be interpreted and then applied in moments of making moral decisions (PH 7§§1–4).

The actual form of the *ainos* varies enormously in the classical and postclassical periods. At one extreme are the ostentatiously lofty victory songs of the choral lyric master Pindar, which mark the occasions for celebrating athletic victories - and which convey to the celebrants various lessons that myth teaches about the making of moral decisions in one’s own life (BA 12§§14–19). At the other extreme are the ostensibly lowly fables of Aesop in the carnivalesque *Life of Aesop*, where the “moral of the story” is implicit in the context of actually telling the story to those who are actually listening to the performance of the fable (BA 16§5–6).

The *ainos* that Phoenix tells in the *Iliad*, drawing on myths concerning the hero Meleager, is intended to persuade Achilles to accept an offer made by Agamemnon. That is the short-range intention of Phoenix as a narrator narrating within the master Narration that is the *Iliad*. But the long-range intention of the master Narrator is quite different from the short-range intention of Phoenix. The master Narrative shows that the embedded narrative of Phoenix was misguided - that is, misguided by hindsight. If Achilles had accepted the offer of Agamemnon, as Phoenix had intended, this acceptance would have undermined the epic reputation of Achilles (HQ 142–143).

So the reaction of Achilles to the *ainos* performed by Phoenix needs to be viewed within the framework of the master Narrative performed by the master Narrator. From the standpoint of Achilles as a {63|64} character who takes shape within the plot of the overall epic that is the *Iliad*, the consequences of his decisions in reacting to the subplot of the epic about Meleager are still unclear at the moment when he makes these decisions. From the standpoint of the master Narrator who narrates the plot of the *Iliad*, on the other hand, the consequences are quite clear, since the master Narration takes shape by way of an interaction between the framed myth about the anger of Meleager and the framing myth about the anger of Achilles (Walsh 2005). The short-range agenda of Phoenix and Achilles will be transformed into the long-range agenda of the master myth, which will ultimately correspond to what actually happens to Achilles in his own heroic life. In the world of epic, heroes live out their lives by living the myths that are their lives.

The point of the story as told by Phoenix is that Achilles must identify with those who are *philoí* ‘near and dear’ - and must therefore rejoin his comrades in war. Phoenix himself, along with Odysseus and Ajax, is a representative of these comrades by virtue of being sent as a delegate to Achilles. More must be said about the word *philos* (singular) / *philoí* (plural), which means ‘friend’ as a noun and ‘near and dear’ as an adjective. The translation ‘dear’ conveys the fact that this word has an important emotional component. As we will see, the meaning of the framed narrative of Phoenix emerges from the framing Narrative of the *Iliad*. As we will also

see, the central theme has to do with the power of emotions, and the central character turns out to be someone who is not mentioned a single time in the framed narrative: that someone is Achilles' best friend, the hero Patroklos.

From the standpoint of Phoenix as narrator, the word *philoī* applies primarily to these three delegates at the moment when he begins to tell his story (IX 528). But this word applies also to the whole group of epic characters who are listening to the telling of this story. This group is composed of (1) Odysseus and Ajax, who are the other two delegates besides Phoenix; (2) the two heralds who accompany the three delegates; (3) Achilles himself; and (4) Patroklos. Inside the story told by Phoenix, the comrades who approach Meleager as delegates are the *philtatoi*, that is, those persons who are 'nearest and dearest' to the hero (IX 585–587). So, from the short-range perspective of Phoenix as the narrator of the *ainos* about Meleager, the three comrades who approach Achilles as delegates must be the persons who are nearest and dearest to him. From the long-range perspective of the master Narrator, however, it is not Phoenix and the two other delegates but Patroklos who must be nearest and dearest to Achilles. Later on in the *Iliad*, after Patroklos is killed in battle, Achilles recognizes this hero as the one who was all {64|65} along the *philtatos*, the 'nearest and dearest' of them all (XVII 411, 655; BA 6§15).

The story about Meleager as narrated by Phoenix is already anticipating such a long-range recognition, since there is someone even nearer and dearer to Meleager than the comrades who are described by Phoenix as *philtatoi*, the 'nearest and dearest' (IX 585–587): in the logic of the story, that someone who is even nearer and dearer than the comrades turns out to be the wife of Meleager (IX 588–596). In Meleager's ascending scale of affection (the term is explained in BA 6§15), the wife of the hero ultimately outranks even the comrades approaching him as delegates. Likewise in Achilles' ascending scale of affection, there is someone who ultimately outranks the comrades approaching him as delegates. For Achilles, that someone is Patroklos, who was all along the *philtatos*, the 'nearest and dearest' of them all (XVII 411, 655). The name of this hero in its full form, *Patroklos*, matches in meaning the name given to the wife of Meleager in the *ainos* narrated by Phoenix: she is *Kleopatra* (IX 556). These two names, *Patroklos* / *Kleopatra*, both mean 'the one who has the glory [*kleos*] of the ancestors [*pateres*]' (BA 6§§15, 17–19). Both these names amount to a periphrasis of the expression *klea andron* | *hōron* 'the glories [*kleos* plural] of men of an earlier time who were heroes' (IX 524–525), which refers to the *ainos* narrated by Phoenix to a group of listeners including not only the delegates approaching Achilles but also Achilles and Patroklos themselves (IX 527–528). Phoenix is presuming that all his listeners are *philoī* 'near and dear' to him (IX 528).

Even before the arrival of the delegates, Achilles himself is pictured as singing the glories of heroes, the *klea andron* (IX 189). At this moment, he is alone except for one person. With him is Patroklos, who is intently listening to him and waiting for his own turn to sing, ready to start at whatever point Achilles leaves off singing (IX 190–191). As Patroklos gets ready to continue the song sung by Achilles, the song of Achilles gets ready to become the song

of Patroklos. So the hero whose name conveys the very idea of *klea andrōn* is figured here as the personal embodiment of the *klea andrōn* (PP 72–73, PR 17).

The *ainos* as told by Phoenix, to which he refers as *klea andrōn* (IX 524), connects with the song of Achilles, to which the master Narrator refers likewise as *klea andrōn* (IX 189). The *ainos* also connects with Patroklos as the one person who is nearest and dearest to Achilles. Patroklos is at the very top of that hero's ascending scale of affection.

What must mean more than anything else to Achilles is not only Patroklos himself but also the actual meaning of the name *Patroklos*, which conveys the idea of the *klea andrōn*. For Achilles, the words *klea* {65|66} *andrōn* represent the master myth in the actual process of being narrated in the epic of the *Iliad*. For Achilles, it is a myth of his own making. And it is myth in the making.

Just as the song of Achilles is identified with the master myth of the *Iliad*, so also the style of this hero's language is identified with the overall style of the master Narrator. In other words, the language of Achilles mirrors the language of the master Narrator. Empirical studies of the language of Homeric diction have shown that the language of Achilles is made distinct from the language of other heroes quoted in the *Iliad*, and this distinctness carries over into the language of the master Narrator, which is thus made distinct from the language of other narrators of epic (Martin 1989:225, 227, 233, 237). It is as if the *klea andrōn* as sung by Achilles - and as heard by Patroklos - were the model for the overall *klea andrōn* as sung by Homer.

The *ainos* as told by Phoenix, to which he refers as *klea andrōn* (IX 524), connects with the overall *klea andrōn* as told by the master Narrator. The connection is made by way of poetic conventions distinguishing the *ainos* from epic. One of these conventions is a set of three features characterizing the rhetoric of the *ainos*. Unlike epic, the *ainos* requires three qualifications of its listeners in order to be understood (PH 6§5):

- 1. The listeners must be *sophoi* 'skilled' in understanding the message encoded in the poetry. That is, they must be mentally qualified.
- 2. They must be *agathoi* 'noble'. That is, they must be morally qualified.
- 3. They must be *philoī* 'near and dear' to each other and to the one who is telling them the *ainos*. That is, they must be emotionally qualified. Communication is achieved through a special sense of community, that is, through recognizing "the ties that bind."

Each of these three features of the *ainos* is made explicit in the lyric poetry of Pindar, which as we have seen refers to itself as *ainos* (PH 6§§5–8). One of these features is also made explicit in the *ainos* narrated by Phoenix, that is, in the *klea andrōn* | *hōrōn*, 'the glories [*kleos* plural] of men of an earlier time who were heroes' (IX 524–525). When it comes to the emotional qualifications required for understanding the *ainos* spoken by Phoenix, we have already seen that the speaker refers to his listeners as *philoī* 'near and dear' to him (IX 528). So the emotional {66|67} requirements of the *ainos* are made quite explicit. By contrast, when it

comes to the moral requirements for understanding the *ainos*, they are merely implicit in the word *philoî*. The moral message as encoded in his *ainos* becomes explicit only at a later point, once the outcome of the master myth is clarified. That point is reached when Patroklos is killed while fighting for his comrades. It is only then that Achilles, for whom the story about the anger of Meleager was intended, ultimately recognizes the moral message of that story.

This kind of recognition, to borrow from the wording used in the lyric poetry of Pindar, shows that the listener has become *sophos* ‘skilled’ in understanding the message encoded in the *ainos*. In the story told by Phoenix, that message is conveyed by the figure of Kleopatra, who is nearest and dearest to Meleager in that hero’s ascending scale of affection. In the logic of the embedded narrative, that figure promotes the moral principle of fighting for one’s comrades, just as the figure of Patroklos, who is nearest and dearest to Achilles, promotes the same principle in the logic of the master Narrative.

Patroklos not only promotes that principle: he exemplifies it through his own epic actions, thereby forfeiting his life. Then, responding to the lesson learned from the death of Patroklos, Achilles will express his willingness to forfeit his own life in order to avenge the death of Patroklos, thereby justifying the principle for which Patroklos had died (*Iliad* XVIII 90-126).

Plato shows his understanding of this moral principle as developed in the master myth of the *Iliad*: in the *Apology* (28c-d), we see a paraphrase of the relevant verses of the *Iliad* (XVIII 90-104), along with some quotations of the original wording. Likewise in Plato’s *Symposium* (179e-180a), we see another paraphrase of the same verses. In the case of this second paraphrase, however, the choice made by Achilles to forfeit his life in order to avenge the death of Patroklos appears to be conflated with another choice that faces the hero. At an earlier point in the *Iliad*, in the context of the so-called Embassy Scene where Achilles is speaking to Phoenix and the other delegates (IX 410-416), he says that he must decide between two *kḗres* ‘fates’ (IX 411): either he dies at a ripe old age after a safe *nostos* ‘homecoming’ to Phthia or he dies young on the battlefield in Troy - and thereby wins for himself a *kleos* ‘glory’ that is *aphthiton* ‘unwiling’ (IX 413).

Plato’s apparent conflation of two choices facing Achilles turns out to be justified: the two choices are in fact one choice. In the Embassy Scene of the *Iliad*, when Achilles says he must choose between two *kḗres* ‘fates’ (IX 411), either a *nostos* ‘homecoming’ or a *kleos* ‘glory’ that is *aphthiton* ‘unwiling’ (IX 413), he is actually not yet ready to make his choice: the {67|68} two alternative fates have simply been foretold for him by his mother, the goddess Thetis (IX 410-411). Later on, after Patroklos has been killed, Achilles is facing the same choice, but by now he has made his decision. He says that there cannot be a homecoming for him (*nostein*: XVIII 90) because he must kill Hector in order to avenge the death of Patroklos, and, once he kills Hector, his own death in battle will become a certainty (XVIII 90-93), just as

his mother had foretold - and as she now foretells again (XVIII 96–97). By choosing to kill Hector, Achilles chooses to die young on the battlefield, and he refers to this death as his inevitable *kḗr* ‘fate’ (XVIII 115). As his compensation, however, he will now win *kleos* ‘glory’ for himself (XVIII 121).

So, ultimately, Achilles decides to choose *kleos* over life itself. Earlier on, however, when the choice is first formulated in the Embassy Scene, it is not yet clear which of the two *kḗres* ‘fates’ (IX 411) will be chosen by the hero - whether it will be a *nostos* ‘homecoming’ or the *kleos* ‘glory’ that is *aphthiton* ‘unwilling’ (IX 413). The hero is saying that he loves the life he possesses more than he loves any other possessions he could win for himself by fighting in Troy, and such other possessions are defined in terms of raiding cattle in particular and acquiring wealth in general (IX 401–408). Still earlier on, in the so-called Quarrel Scene at the very start of the *Iliad*, in Rhapsody I, such possessions are being defined in terms of the women as well as the cattle and the general wealth that the hero has already acquired in the course of raiding the Aeolic territories in the vicinity of Troy. At the start, the hero’s sense of *timḗ* ‘honor’ is simply a function of all the possessions he has acquired. The prime example of such possessions is Briseis, a woman whom Achilles captured in one of his raiding expeditions in the Aeolic territories: in the Quarrel Scene at the beginning of the *Iliad*, when Briseis is forcibly taken from Achilles by Agamemnon, she is treated merely as a war-prize, a trophy, and the hero’s loss is seen as a loss of possessions, a loss of property. And yet, though the hero’s honor is being expressed exclusively in terms of property in the Quarrel Scene of Rhapsody I, things have changed by the time Achilles speaks to Phoenix in the Embassy Scene of Rhapsody IX. By then, Achilles has rethought the loss of Briseis. By now this loss has become the loss of a personal relationship, and Achilles even says he loves Briseis as he would love a wife (IX 340–343).

So the *ainos* of Phoenix about Meleager, a hero who seems at first to love his wife more than he loves his own comrades, will now take on a special meaning for the hero of the master myth that is the *Iliad*. But there are vital questions that remain: does Achilles love his would-be wife more than he loves his comrades - or even more than life itself? Here is where the name of Meleager’s own wife, *Kleopatra*, becomes essential. As we have seen, the meaning of this character’s name is parallel to the meaning of *Patroklos*, the name of the one character who means more to Achilles than anyone else in the whole world. After Patroklos is killed, this hero is recognized as the one single character who was nearest and dearest {68 | 69} to Achilles. Achilles now says that he has all along valued Patroklos as much as he has valued his own life (XVIII 80–82).

So the hero Ajax misses the point when he accuses Achilles of loving Briseis more than he loves his comrades (IX 622–638). Achilles loves his would-be wife the same way that Meleager loves Kleopatra, but there is a deeper meaning to be found in that hero’s love for Kleopatra, and that deeper meaning has to do with the relevance of the name of Kleopatra to

Achilles. What Achilles loves more than anything else in the whole world is what the name of Kleopatra means to Meleager - and what the name of his own nearest and dearest comrade Patroklos means to him. As we have seen, these two names *Patroklos* / *Kleopatra* both mean ‘the one who has the glory [*kleos*] of the ancestors [*pateres*]’, and both these names amount to a periphrasis of the expression *klea andron* | *hērōn* ‘the glories [*kleos* plural] of men of an earlier time who were heroes’ (IX 524–525).

Just as Patroklos made the moral choice of loving his comrades more than life itself, actually giving up his life for them, so also Achilles will now make the moral choice of giving up his own life for his comrade Patroklos - and for the meaning of Patroklos. The meaning of the name of Patroklos, ‘the one who has the glory [*kleos*] of the ancestors [*pateres*]’, recapitulates the epic choice of Achilles, who ultimately opts for *kleos* over life itself. That is why the epic *kleos* chosen by Achilles must be *aphthiton* ‘unwilted’ forever (IX 413): the *kleos* of Achilles is like a flower so beautiful that it must not ever lose its divine vitality.

This epic *kleos* chosen by Achilles is also a lyric *kleos*. Achilles is pictured as singing the *klea andron* ‘glories of heroes’ (IX 189) while accompanying himself on a lyre he plundered when he captured the native city of that greatest singer of lamentations in the *Iliad*, Andromache (IX 186–189). As I argue in the companion piece “Lyric and Greek Myth,” this epic song of Achilles is like an echo of the loves and bittersweet sorrows heard in lyric song, and such lyrical feelings are typically linked not only with Achilles but also with that most celebrated pair of doomed lovers, namely, Andromache and the man who earns the ultimate hatred and fury of Achilles in the *Iliad*, Hector (HPC II§297). The *kleos* of Achilles is a form of song that dwells on the hatred and the fury, the love and the sorrow - and on the power of song in expressing all these intensely lyrical feelings.

Unlike Achilles, who must choose between *kleos* and *nostos* in the *Iliad*, the epic hero Odysseus must have both *kleos* and *nostos* in the *Odyssey*. For Odysseus to live out the master myth of his own heroic life, he must have a *nostos* or ‘homecoming’. For Odysseus to succeed in coming home to Ithaca, however, his *nostos* must be more than simply a ‘homecoming’: it must be also a ‘song about a homecoming’. The *kleos* or epic glory of Odysseus depends on his *nostos*, that is, on the song about his homecoming, which is the *Odyssey*. By contrast, the *kleos* of Achilles must be divorced from the very idea of ever achieving a successful *nostos*: as we have seen, Achilles will win *kleos* by dying young {69|70} at Troy, but he will lose this *kleos* if he has a *nostos* and dies old at home (*Iliad* IX 413). For Achilles, *nostos* would be merely a homecoming, not a song about a homecoming that wins him any *kleos*. And the *kleos* that he wins by dying young is the *Iliad* itself.

Although Odysseus is credited with the epic feat of destroying the city of Troy, as the *Odyssey* proclaims at the very beginning (i 2), his *kleos* in that epic does not and cannot depend on the story of Troy. It depends instead on the story of his homecoming to Ithaca. By contrast,

although Achilles is never credited with the destruction of Troy, since he is killed well before that event takes place, his *kleos* nonetheless depends on the story of Troy. More than that, his *kleos* is in fact the story of Troy. The name of the *Iliad*, which equates itself with the *kleos* of Achilles, means literally ‘the song of Ilion’, that is, the song of Troy (EH §49). So, for Odysseus to get his own *kleos*, which is the story of his homecoming to Ithaca in the *Odyssey*, he must get over the *kleos* of Achilles, which is the story of Troy in the *Iliad*. He must get over the *Iliad* and get on with the *Odyssey*. In other words, he must get on with his *nostos*, which is not only his homecoming to Ithaca but also the song about this homecoming. That is the essence of the master myth of the *Odyssey* (BA 1999 Preface §§16–18; 2§§10–18).

For Odysseus to get over the *Iliad*, he must sail past it. His ongoing story, which is the *Odyssey*, must be about the sailor who is making his way back home, not about the warrior who once fought at Troy. The *kleos* of Odysseus at Troy cannot be the master myth of the *Odyssey*, since the *kleos* of Achilles at Troy has already become the master myth of the *Iliad*. The *kleos* of Achilles in the *Iliad* has preempted a *kleos* for Odysseus that centers on this rival hero’s glorious exploits at Troy. For the hero of the *Odyssey*, the ongoing *kleos* of his adventures in the course of his *nostos* is actually threatened by any past *kleos* of his adventures back at Troy. Such a *kleos* of the past in the *Odyssey* could not rival the *kleos* of the more distant past in the *Iliad*. It would be a false *Iliad*. That is why Odysseus must sail past the Island of the Sirens. The Sirens, as false Muses, tempt the hero by offering to sing for him an endless variety of songs about Troy in particular and about everything else in general (*Odyssey* xii 184–191). The sheer pleasure of listening to the songs of the Sirens threatens not only the homecoming of Odysseus, who is tempted to linger and never stop listening to the endless stories about Troy, but also the ongoing song about that homecoming, that is, the *Odyssey* itself (BA Preface §17n; EH §50).

Just as Odysseus achieves his *kleos* by achieving his *nostos*, so also does his son, Telemakhos. When the son goes on a quest for the *kleos* of {70|71} his father (*Odyssey* iii 83), this quest is also for the father’s *nostos* (ii 360; EH §53). To aid the young hero in this quest, the goddess Athena assumes the role of ‘mentor’ to him, and so she becomes personified as a fatherly epic hero, turning into *Mentōs* in Rhapsody i of the *Odyssey* and into *Mentōr* in Rhapsody ii (GM 113).

The rivalry of Odysseus and Achilles in the story of Troy is formalized in a dispute between the two heroes: was the city to be destroyed by *bī* ‘force’, as represented by the hero Achilles, or by *mētis* ‘craft’, as represented by Odysseus? There are indirect references to this dispute in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (BA 3§§5, 7), and some of these references are relevant to the master myths of the two epics (as in *Iliad* IX 423–426 and in *Odyssey* viii 72–82 respectively). Ultimately, the craft or craftiness of Odysseus in devising the stratagem of the Wooden Horse leads to the destruction of Troy, as narrated by the disguised hero himself in the *Odyssey* (viii 492–520). This validation of craft at the expense of force does not translate, however, into a validation of Odysseus at the expense of Achilles in the overall story of Troy.

As we have just seen, the story of Troy is the *kleos* of Achilles in the *Iliad*, not the *kleos* of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*.

Even in situations where the *mētis* ‘craft’ of Odysseus helps advance the homecoming of the hero in the *Odyssey*, it does nothing to advance the *kleos* of his past epic exploits at Troy. A case in point is the decisive moment in the *Odyssey* when Odysseus devises the stratagem of calling himself *Outis* ‘no one’ (ix 366) in order to deceive and then blind Polyphemus the Cyclops. The pronoun *ou tis* ‘no one’ used by the hero for the crafting of his false name deceives not only the Cyclops but also the monster’s fellow Cyclopes when they use the same pronoun to ask the blinded Polyphemus this question: perhaps someone has wronged you? (ix 405, 406). The syntax of the question, expressing the uncertainty of the questioners, requires the changing of the pronoun *ou tis* ‘no one’ into its modal byform *mētis* ‘perhaps someone’, which sounds like the noun *mētis* ‘craft’. The modal byform *mētis* is signaling here, by design, the verbal craft used by Odysseus in devising this stratagem (BA 20§4n7). And this act of signaling by design is made explicit later on when the narrating hero actually refers to his stratagem as a *mētis* (ix 414). The same can be said about the hero’s previous stratagem of blinding the Cyclops with a sharpened stake, an act of craftiness compared to the craft of blacksmiths (ix 390-394). These and all other stratagems used by the hero against the Cyclops qualify as *mētis* ‘craft’ (ix 422). {71 | 72}

It goes without saying that the stratagem of crafting the false name *Outis* succeeds: when the blinded Cyclops answers the question of his fellow Cyclopes, perhaps someone has wronged you? (ix 405, 406), he uses the non-modal form of the pronoun, saying *ou tis* ‘no one’ has wronged me (ix 408). Still, though this stratagem succeeds in rescuing Odysseus (and, for the moment, some of his comrades), it fails to rescue the hero’s past *kleos* in Troy. In fact, the stratagem of Odysseus in calling himself *Outis* ‘no one’ produces just the opposite effect: it erases any previous claim to any *kleos* that the hero would have had before he entered the cave of the Cyclops. Such erasure is signaled by the epithet *outidanos* ‘good-for-nothing’, derivative of the pronoun *ou tis* ‘no one’: whenever this epithet is applied to a hero in the *Iliad*, it is intended to revile the name of that hero by erasing his epic identity (as in *Iliad* XI 390). Such erasure means that someone who used to have a name will now no longer have a name and has therefore become a nobody, a no one, *ou tis*. In the *Odyssey*, the Cyclops reviles the name of the man who blinded him by applying this same epithet *outidanos* ‘good-for-nothing’ to the false name *Outis* (ix 460). The effect of applying this epithet completes the erasure of the hero’s past identity that was started by Odysseus when he renamed himself as *ou tis* ‘no one’. The name that the hero had heretofore achieved for himself has been reduced to nothing and must hereafter be rebuilt from nothing.

It is relevant that the annihilation of the hero’s identity happens in the darkness of an otherworldly cave, in the context of extinguishing the light of the single eye of the Cyclops, thereby darkening forever the monster’s power to perceive the truth - unless he hears it. In the

poetics of Greek myth, both epic and lyric, the identity or non-identity of a hero matches the presence or absence of light: in the words of Pindar (*Pythian* 8.95–97), the difference between being *tis* ‘someone’ and being *ou tis* ‘no one’ becomes visible when a burst of light and life coming from Zeus himself illuminates the void of darkness and death (Nagy 2000:110–111).

It is just as relevant that the master Narrative of the *Odyssey* situates Odysseus in the darkness of another otherworldly cave at the very beginning of that narrative. At the point chosen for the beginning of the actual storytelling (i 11 *entha* ‘there’), the first detail to be narrated is that Odysseus is at this moment being deprived of his *nostos* (i 13) by a goddess called Calypso (i 14) who is keeping him concealed in her cave (i 15). The feelings of attraction associated with the beautiful nymph Calypso are matched by feelings of repulsion evoked by her terrifying name *Kalups*, derived from the verb *kaluptein* ‘conceal’ (GM 254n108; Crane 1988): this verb is traditionally used in ritual formulas of burial, {72|73} and it conveys the idea of consigning the dead to concealment in the realm of darkness and death (as in *Iliad* VI 464, XXIII 91).

Of all the tales of homecomings experienced by the Achaean heroes after Troy, whether these homecomings succeed or fail, only the tale of Odysseus is still untold at the beginning of the *Odyssey*. Only his homecoming is still in doubt. This is the point being made at the very start of the tale: that the narrative is being kept in a state of suspension, and the cause of this suspension is said to be the goddess Calypso, who is preventing Odysseus from his *nostos* (i 13) by keeping him concealed in her cave (i 15). For the narrative to start, the *nostos* of Odysseus has to be activated, and so the Olympian gods intervene to ensure the eventual homecoming of Odysseus to Ithaca (i 16–17).

In Rhapsody v of the *Odyssey*, the Olympians send the god Hermes as their messenger to Calypso, and he tells her that she must allow Odysseus to make his way back home. So she must stop preventing Odysseus from getting started with the master myth of the *Odyssey*. That master myth is the *nostos* of Odysseus, which must be not only the hero’s homecoming but also the song about his homecoming.

The role of the goddess Calypso in threatening to prevent the *nostos* of the hero Odysseus is reflected in the tales that she herself tells the god Hermes about other heroes who became lovers of other goddesses: the outcome of these tales is death (*Odyssey* v 118–129). For example, the hero Orion is killed off by Artemis because he became the lover of Eos, the goddess of the dawn (v 121–124). And the narrative of the *Odyssey* actually foretells a similar death for Odysseus – if he had continued to be the lover of Calypso (v 271–275; BA 10§39).

The relationship of Odysseus and Calypso shows that the *nostos* of the hero is not only a ‘homecoming’ but also, more basically, a ‘return’. That is, the *nostos* of the hero is not only a return to Ithaca but also, in a mystical sense, a return to light and life (Frame 1978). To return

from the cave of Calypso at the end of Rhapsody xii of the *Odyssey* is to return from the darkness and death of that cave. The same can be said about the return of Odysseus from the cave of the Cyclops Polyphemus at the end of Rhapsody ix of the *Odyssey*.

Even more basically, the same can also be said about the return of Odysseus from Hades at the beginning of Rhapsody xii of the *Odyssey*. Here too we see the theme of returning to light and life (Frame 1978).

This grand theme takes shape at the beginning of Rhapsody xi of the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus starts to make his descent into Hades after a series of wanderings that take him farther and farther westward toward the outer limits of the world. The island of the goddess Circe, situated {73|74} at these outer limits in the Far West, becomes the point of departure for the hero's planned entry into Hades (xi 1–12), but the actual point of entry is situated even farther west than that mystical island, since Odysseus has to cross the river Okeanos before he can cross over into Hades (xi 13, 21). The Okeanos must be even farther west than the island of Circe. That is because the Okeanos is the absolute marker of the Far West.

The Okeanos is situated at the outermost limits of the world, which is encircled by its stream. The circular stream of the Okeanos flows eternally around the world and eternally recycles the infinite supply of fresh water that feeds upon itself (*Iliad* XIV 246–246a, XVIII 399, XX 65; HC 2 sections 13–15, 18). This mystical river Okeanos, surrounding not only the earth but even the seas surrounding the earth, defines the limits of the known world. Every evening, as the sun sets at sunset, it literally plunges into the fresh waters of this eternally self-recycling cosmic stream (*Iliad* VIII 485), and it is from these same fresh waters that the sun rises again every morning at sunrise (*Iliad* VII 421–423; *Odyssey* xix 433–434).

After his sojourn in Hades, which is narrated in Rhapsody xi of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus finally emerges from this realm of darkness and death at the beginning of Rhapsody xii. But the island of Circe is no longer in the Far West. When Odysseus returns from Hades, crossing again the circular cosmic stream of Okeanos (xii 1–2) and coming back to his point of departure, that is, to the island of the goddess Circe (xii 3), we find that this island is no longer in the Far West: instead, it is now in the Far East, where Helios the god of the sun has his 'sunrises', *an(a)tolai* (xii 4) and where Eos the goddess of the dawn has her own palace, featuring a special space for her 'choral dancing and singing', *khoroï* (xii 3–4). Before the hero's descent into the realm of darkness and death, we saw the Okeanos as the absolute marker of the Far West; after his ascent into the realm of light and life, we see it as the absolute marker of the Far East (GM 237). In returning to the island of Circe by crossing the circular cosmic river Okeanos for the second time, the hero has come full circle, experiencing sunrise after having experienced sunset.

This return of the hero into the realm of light and life is a journey of a soul. The word that I translate for the moment as ‘soul’ is *psukhē*, which is used in Homeric poetry to refer to the soul of the dead - or to the life of the living (GM 87–93). The journey of the soul after death replicates the journey of the sun after sunset, as we see from the wording of a death wish expressed by Penelope in the *Odyssey*: after dying, she pictures herself as journeying to the Far West and, once there, plunging into the waters of the Okeanos (xx 61–65; GM 99n61). As we {74|75} saw earlier, the sun is imagined as plunging into these waters at sunset and then emerging from these same waters at sunrise. So also the soul of the hero can be imagined as replicating that same cycle (GM 90–91).

But the return of the hero’s *psukhē* to light and life at sunrise is not made explicit in Homeric poetry. Instead, Odysseus himself personally experiences such a return when he returns from Hades at the beginning of Rhapsody xii of the *Odyssey*. This experience of Odysseus, by way of replicating the mystical journey of the sun, is a substitute for the mystical journey of a soul. This way, the *nostos* of Odysseus, as an epic narrative, becomes interwoven with a mystical subnarrative. While the epic narrative tells about the hero’s return from Troy to Ithaca, the mystical subnarrative tells about the soul’s return from darkness and death to light and life. In lyric traditions, the mystical subnarrative of the hero’s *nostos* can even be foregrounded (as in Theognis 1123–1124: Nagy 1985 §69).

At the beginning of the *Odyssey*, both the epic narrative about the hero’s return to his home and the mystical subnarrative about the soul’s return to light and life are recapitulated in the double meaning of *psukhē* as either ‘life’ or ‘soul’:

That man, Muse, tell me the story of that man, the one who could change in many
different ways who he was, the one who in many different ways
veered from his path, once he destroyed the sacred citadel of Troy.
Many different cities of many different people did he see, getting to know different ways
of thinking [*noos*].
Many were the pains [*algea*] he suffered in his heart while crossing the sea,
struggling to win as his prize his own *psukhē* and *nostos* - as well as the *nostos* of his
comrades,
and he saved himself but could not save his comrades, though he very much wanted to.

Odyssey i 1–6

The hero’s *noos* ‘thinking’ (verse 3) keeps changing just as he keeps changing, adapting to the different ways that different people in different places do their own ‘thinking’. In the myth foretold by the seer Teiresias about the travels of Odysseus beyond the *Odyssey*, for example, Odysseus will have to change the way he is thinking about the oar he is told to carry on his shoulder as he journeys to highlands far removed from the {75|76} sea: people whose life depends on travel by sea will think of what he carries on his shoulder as an oar, but people

whose life depends on cultivating the land will think of the same thing as a winnowing shovel (xi 121–137; xxiii 265–284). Only Odysseus will know that what he is carrying on his shoulder as he goes from city to city (xxiii 267–268) means different things depending on where he is - either an oar or a winnowing shovel (GM 212–215).

The noun *noos* means thinking in the sense of being conscious, not being unconscious: like the noun *nostos*, it is derived from the root **nes-* in the mystical sense of returning to light and life (Frame 1978).

The hero's *nostos* 'return' (verse 5) connects with his *noos* 'thinking' (verse 3) not only in the explicit sense of thinking about saving his own life but also in the implicit sense of being conscious of returning home. This implicit sense is encoded in the telling of the myth about the Land of the Lotus-Eaters (ix 82–104). When Odysseus visits that land, those of his comrades who eat the lotus lose their consciousness of home and therefore cannot return home. The verb *lēth-* 'forget', combined with *nostos* 'return' as its object, conveys the idea of such unconsciousness (ix 97, 102). By contrast, the noun *noos* 'thinking' conveys the idea of being conscious of *nostos*.

The very idea of consciousness as conveyed by *noos* is derived from the metaphor of returning to light from darkness, as encapsulated in the moment of waking up from sleep, or of regaining consciousness after losing consciousness, that is, of "coming to." This metaphor of coming to is at work not only in the meaning of *noos* in the sense of consciousness but also in the meaning of *nostos* in the sense of returning from darkness and death to light and life. Remarkably, these two meanings converge at one single point in the master myth of the *Odyssey*. It happens when Odysseus finally reaches his homeland of Ithaca. He has been sailing home on a ship provided by the Phaeacians, against the will of the god Poseidon, and he falls into a deep sleep that most resembles death itself (xiii 79–80). This sleep makes him momentarily unconscious: he 'forgets', as expressed by the verb *lēth-* (xiii 92), all the *algea* 'pains' of his past journeys through so many different cities of so many different people (xiii 90–91). Then, at the very moment when the ship reaches the shore of the hero's homeland, the morning star appears, heralding the coming of dawn (xiii 93–95). The Phaeacians hurriedly leave Odysseus on the beach where they placed him, still asleep, when they landed (xiii 119), and, once they sail away, he wakes up there (xiii 187). So the moment of the hero's homecoming, which is synchronized with the moment of sunrise, is {76|77} now further synchronized with a moment of awakening from a sleep that most resembles death.

From this moment on, now that Odysseus has succeeded in making his return from his journeys at sea, he must succeed also in making another kind of return. That is, he must now return to his former social status as king at home in Ithaca. In the course of the twenty years that elapsed since his departure for Troy, however, the hero's social status at home has been reduced to nothing. So now, most fittingly, he disguises himself as a beggar. Now he must work

his way up from the bottom of the social scale, starting from nothing. He starts by being a nobody – that is, by being a somebody who has nothing and is therefore a nobody. As a beggar, he hides his social and moral nobility as king. This way, his interaction with the suitors of his wife exposes them as lacking in interior moral nobility despite their exterior social nobility (Nagy 1985 §§68–70).

Earlier in the *Odyssey*, the status of Odysseus as a hero of epic had already been reduced to nothing. As we saw in the tale of his encounter with the Cyclops, the return of Odysseus from the monster’s cave deprives him of his past identity at Troy. His epic fame can no longer depend on his power of *mētis* ‘craft’, which had brought about the destruction of Troy. After his encounter with the Cyclops, Odysseus must achieve a new epic identity as the hero of his own epic about homecoming, about his own *nostos*, but, for the moment, his confidence in his power to bring about this *nostos* is reduced to nothing. He has lost his confidence in the power of his own *mētis* to devise a stratagem for achieving a *nostos*. When he reaches the island of Circe and learns that this place, though it first seems familiar and reminiscent of his own island, is in fact strange and alien and antithetical to home, he despairs (x 190–202). The passage where the hero expresses his desperation shows why he despairs. He thinks he has lost his *mētis*:

My friends, I am speaking this way because I do not know which place is west and
which place is east
- which is the place where the sun, bringing light for mortals, goes underneath the earth
and which is the place where it rises. Still, let us start thinking it through, as quickly as
we can,
whether there is still any craft [*mētis*] left. I must tell you, though, I think there is
none.

Odyssey x 190–193 {77 | 78}

The hero feels he has no *mētis* or ‘craft’ left in him to devise a stratagem for a successful homecoming, and his despair is expressed as a feeling of disorientation. He is no longer able to distinguish between orient and occident. To restate in terms of two words used elsewhere in the *Odyssey*, the hero is experiencing a loss of orientation in his *noos* or ‘thinking’, and this loss is presently blocking his *nostos* ‘homecoming’.

The hero’s despair makes his comrades despair as well: as soon as they hear the news of their leader’s disorientation, they break down and cry (x 198–202) as they recall Antiphates the Laestrygonian and Polyphemus the Cyclops (x 199–200). The recalling of these two monstrous figures evokes not only some of the worst moments experienced by Odysseus and his comrades since they left Troy. It evokes also some of the worst moments experienced by all the Achaeans when they were still at Troy. Strangely, when the comrades of Odysseus recall Polyphemus, the monster is described by way of the epithet *megálē tēr* ‘great-hearted’ (x 200), and this same

description applies also to Antiphates in an alternative version of a verse attested elsewhere in the *Odyssey* (x 106). Beyond these two attestations, this epithet occurs nowhere else in the *Odyssey*, whereas it occurs regularly as a conventional description of generic warriors in the *Iliad* (BA 20§4n8). Why, then, are these two Odyssean monsters described by way of an Iliadic epithet? It is relevant that Antiphates, like Polyphemus, is an eater of raw human flesh in the *Odyssey* (x 116). In the *Iliad*, the urge to eat raw human flesh is experienced by heroes in their darkest moments of bestial fury, as when Achilles says he is sorely tempted to cut up and eat raw his deadliest enemy, Hector (XXII 346–347). So the heroic disorientation of Odysseus in the *Odyssey* evokes nightmarish memories of heroic dehumanization in the *Iliad* (BA 20§4).

Despite such moments of disorientation for Odysseus, his *noos* ‘thinking’ ultimately reorients him, steering him away from his Iliadic past and toward his ultimate Odyssean future. That is, the hero’s *noos* makes it possible for him to achieve a *nostos*, which is not only his ‘homecoming’ but also the ‘song about a homecoming’ that is the *Odyssey*. For this song to succeed, Odysseus must keep adapting his identity by making his *noos* fit the *noos* of the many different characters he encounters in the course of his *nostos* in progress. In order to adapt, he must master many different forms of discourse, many different kinds of *ainos*. That is why he is addressed as *poluainos* ‘having many different kinds of *ainos*’ by the Sirens when he sails past their island (xii 184; BA 12§19n1; PH 8§30).

Even the transparent meaning of Polyphemus (*Poluphōmos*), the name of the Cyclops blinded by Odysseus, foretells the hero’s mastery {78|79} of the *ainos*. As an adjective, *poluphōmos* means ‘having many different kinds of prophetic utterance’, derived from the noun *phōmō* ‘prophetic utterance’ (as in xx 100, 105; HR 55–59); this adjective is applied as an epithet to the singer *Phōmios* (xxii 376), portrayed in the *Odyssey* as a master of the *phōmō* ‘prophetic utterance’ (BA 1§4n1). In the case of Polyphemus, the very meaning of his name, which conveys the opposite of the meaning conveyed by the false name of Odysseus, *Outis* ‘no one’, foretells the verbal mastery of the hero who blinded the monster.

After the return of Odysseus from Hades, he finds his way to the island of the Phaeacians, where he starts the process of rebuilding his epic identity from nothing by retelling for them all his experiences since he left Troy. This retelling, which extends from the beginning of Rhapsody ix to the end of Rhapsody xii, is coterminous with the telling of the *Odyssey* up to the point where Odysseus leaves the cave of Calypso. Then, after Odysseus finishes his narration, he leaves the island of the Phaeacians and finally comes back home to Ithaca, where his narration is taken over by the master Narrator of the *Odyssey*. The process of rebuilding the hero’s epic identity continues in the master Narration, but now the direct mode of speaking used by Odysseus in telling the Phaeacians about his ongoing *nostos* gives way to an indirect mode, analogous to the indirect mode of speaking that he had used earlier before he made contact with the Phaeacians. Now, after his encounter with the Phaeacians, Odysseus becomes once again the master of the *ainos*.

From here on, the tales Odysseus tells are masterpieces of mythmaking as embedded in the master myth of the *Odyssey*. One such tale is a “Cretan lie” told by the disguised Odysseus to the swineherd Eumaios about the Trojan War (xiv 192–359; BA 7§26, 12§14); at a later point in their verbal exchanges, Eumaios refers to another tale told by Odysseus about the Trojan War (xiv 462–506) by describing it as a faultless *ainos* (xiv 508; BA 12§§14–16). As a master of the *ainos*, Odysseus keeps on adapting his identity by making his *noos* fit the *noos* of the many different characters he encounters. And the multiple *ainoi* of Odysseus can thus be adapted to the master myth of the *Odyssey*.

By the time all is said and done in the master myth of the *Odyssey*, the character of Odysseus has become fully adapted to his ultimate role as the multiform central hero of this epic, a fitting counterpoint to the monolithic central hero of the *Iliad*, Achilles. This ultimate adaptation of Odysseus demonstrates his prodigious adaptability as a character in myth. He is the ultimate multiform. {79 | 80} That is why he is called *polutropos* at the very beginning of the *Odyssey*, that is, ‘the one who could change in many different ways who he was’ (i 1).

Odysseus can be all things to all people. His character undergoes the most fantastic imaginable adventures of the mind during his journeys – and the most realistic personal experiences when he finally reaches his home in Ithaca. The psychological realism of this hero’s character when we see him at home with himself tempts us to forget about the fantastic journeys of his *psukhē* in alien realms. Our sense of the familiar blocks our sense of the unfamiliar. Our mentality as modern readers invites us to see Odysseus at home as “reality” and Odysseus abroad as “myth,” as if the myth of the hero contradicted the reality of the hero.

Such a split vision is a false dichotomy. The reality of Odysseus is in fact the myth of Odysseus, since that myth derives from the historical reality of Homeric poetry as a medium of myth. The reality of the myth is the reality of the medium that conveys the myth to its listeners over time.

Even the Ithaca of Odysseus is real only to the extent that it was recognized as real by those who heard epics about Odysseus over time. For listeners of the *Odyssey* in the classical period of the fifth century BCE, this Ithaca of Odysseus was the island then known as Ithakē. In earlier periods, on the other hand, the Ithaca of Odysseus may well have been what is now the western peninsula of the island now known as Kefalonia. This peninsula, now known as Paliki, had once been an island west of Kefalonia (Bittlestone 2005, Bordewich 2006), and such a prehistoric Ithaca would fit the Homeric description of the hero’s home as the westernmost of all the other islands nearby (*Odyssey* ix 25–26).

In their greatest moments of epic action, the heroes of Homeric poetry show their true nature. They are larger than life, superhuman, especially in their interactions with gods. Not

only in Greek epics but also in cognate epics like the Indic *Mahābhārata*, the superhuman status of heroes depends on their special relationship with divinity and with the sacred (EH §§70-73).

The age of epic heroes is a sacred world of myth that must be set apart from the everyday world of the present. The mythology of epic heroes must distance itself from the present by holding on to a remote past far removed from the world of listeners hearing the glories of heroes. To hold on to such a past, this mythology must show not only that an age of heroes existed once upon a time but also, just as {80|81} important, that such an age does not exist any more. It must privilege what is past over what is present, and it must remake that past into a sacred age of heroes.

Homeric poetry, as the primary epic mediator of myth, remakes the perceived past into such a sacred age by way of deliberately privileging realities perceived as belonging to a past age of heroes. Such realities can be tested by comparing them with corresponding realities ascertained independently by way of empirical approaches.

One such empirical approach to Homeric poetry is provided by the discipline of archaeology (Snodgrass 1987). The external dating criteria provided by the existing archaeological evidence point to many centuries of evolution for the oral poetic tradition that culminated in the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. A major point of convergence for archaeology and the study of Homeric poetry is the story of the Trojan War - or, more accurately, Trojan Wars - and the degree to which the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* reflect the realities of the late second millennium BCE (Sherratt 1990).

Homeric poetry, in the process of evolving as an oral tradition, reflects the realities of Greek civilization all the way from the middle of the second millennium BCE to the seventh century BCE and perhaps even later. This formulation, which takes into account the testimony of (1) Homeric poetry as an ongoing system of communication and (2) the successive layers of archaeological evidence, represents an evolutionary model (Sherratt 1990).

The archaeological evidence is supplemented by the important testimony of the so-called Mycenaean Linear B tablets, the earliest attestation of the Greek language in writing (on the factor of writing in general, see Woodard 1997). It can be argued that the Linear B documents show a cross section, dating back to the Mycenaean civilization of the second millennium BCE, of a phase of overall Greek civilization that decisively shaped the evolution of the Homeric tradition (Palmer 1979; on the name of Achilles as a reflex of “Mycenaean epic,” see HTL 131–137).

Another empirical approach to Homeric poetry is provided by the discipline of art history. The evolving traditions of visual arts, going as far back as the middle of the second millennium BCE and even beyond, can be compared as parallel to the evolving traditions of the

verbal arts as represented by Homeric poetry. A most dramatic illustration is the cross section provided by the miniature frescoes of Thera (Morris 1989). In these frescoes, which are dated well before the middle of the second millennium BCE, we can find {81 | 82} representations of various themes that match corresponding themes in Homeric poetry, and the resulting visual-verbal correspondences can lead to the conclusion that at least some of these Homeric themes, such as the “tale of two cities” as represented on the Shield of Achilles in *Iliad* XVIII, were well over a thousand years old before they were finally recorded in written versions of the Homeric *Iliad* (for more on the Shield, see HR 72–87).

Yet another empirical approach to Homeric poetry is provided by the discipline of historical linguistics (Nagy 1974; Muellner 1976; Frame 1978; see in general Watkins 1995). The application of this approach to the diction of oral poetry yields new techniques of reconstruction, where the terminus of a given reconstruction backward in time can stop short of a “proto-language” phase. (See, for example, HTL 131–137 on the name of Achilles, where the terminus of the reconstruction stops short of “proto-Indo-European”; West 1988 and 1992 surveys the evidence provided by linguistics for the derivation of Homeric poetry from Indo-European poetic antecedents; for similar conclusions but different perspectives, see Nagy 1974, supplemented in PH Appendix.) Such reconstructions of Homeric poetry from Indo-European models need to take into account the lateral influence of Near Eastern languages and civilizations, especially in the eighth and seventh centuries BCE (EH §§21–30).

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